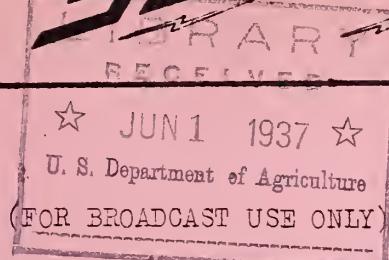


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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT



Friday, June 4, 1937

Subject: "PROPER REFRIGERATOR STORAGE FOR MEATS AND MILK." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Refrigerators of one sort or another have had an important place in American households for a good many years. Longer than you might think.

Most of you women probably remember the days when the iceman came along with an irregular block of ice cut from the river the winter before. He laid it in the grass at the back door long enough for us to pump a bucket of water to pour over the ice and rinse off the straw or sawdust. Then he usually had to chip off a layer or so to make the ice cake fit the box. That meant grand pieces left in the grass for children to pounce upon and eat.

Nowadays ice comes to the refrigerator in regulation sizes and weights. And there's no sawdust to be washed off. And for some of us there's a mechanical refrigerator so that no iceman is needed.

Each year sees more and more homes with refrigerators. And goodness knows they are needed. Especially for meats and dairy products. Home economists say that for safe storage of milk and meat a refrigerator should have a temperature of 45 degrees. Or even below, if they are to be kept more than 24 hours.

Meat and milk should go in the very coldest spot of your refrigerator. Where that coldest spot is depends upon the refrigerator. If you have a mechanical one, the coldest place is directly below the freezing unit. The clean cold air drops down from this freezing unit. That is particularly true when the defrosting pan is out. And by the way, you could just leave that defrosting pan out when you are not using it to hold extra ice cubes. Or when you aren't defrosting. Leaving out the defrosting pan speeds up circulation within the cabinet and tends to make the place somewhat colder.

I know, some mechanical refrigerators are so built that you can't put milk below the freezing unit. You have to put your milk bottles beside it. That isn't the coldest place but in a well insulated refrigerator it is probably cold enough.

If your refrigerator is an ice one, you might need to examine it to figure how the air currents travel. If there's a sheet of metal below the icebox, and the metal tilts toward the back, with a space between the edge of the sheet and the back wall, the coldest place will be somewhere in line with the down current from that opening.

If there are two metal sections, separated by a space across the center, the cold air will drop down the center of the cabinet. Some refrigerators are so built that the temperature of the cabinet is pretty uniform. In others there may be as much as eight degrees variation.

Not only should dairy products be kept in your refrigerator's coldest place, but they should also be kept covered. They are far too hospitable to passing odors and bacteria for their own good. For that reason butter should be left in its oilpaper and in a covered dish.

Which reminds me of an icebox I had a glimpse of the other day. Nesting against the cake of ice were two quart bottles of milk, and perched on top of the ice was a pound print of butter, quite uncovered -- just set on its oiled paper. I shuddered to think of all the food odors that butter had taken up.

You see, in an ice refrigerator the clean air currents drop down to cool the contents of the cabinet, and take up heat and odors, and maybe some bacteria from the food it passes by and then rise to go back to the ice. There the odors are taken up by the film of melting ice and are carried away down the drain. In a mechanical refrigerator, odors are deposited in the frost on the evaporator. Well that butter perched on the ice was in the very worst possible place as far as absorbing odors was concerned.

Food should never be put in with the ice. In the first place because it interferes with the free circulation of air around the ice. Secondly, unless it is covered, food so placed can absorb odors too easily. Not only do dairy products have to be covered and in the coldest spot in a refrigerator but dishes made from them need the same treatment. Desserts made of milk or cream, creamed vegetable and meat-dish-left-overs also must be covered and cold.

Whereas dairy products must be covered, fresh meat must be left uncovered in your refrigerator. When you bring meat home, the first thing to do is to take off the wrapping paper and look the meat over for any signs of visible dirt. These you wipe or scrape off -- you don't wash them off. The surface of raw meat is already so moist that it easily takes up bacteria. Then you should put that meat onto a shallow dish and set it into the refrigerator with no covering. You see, air should be able to reach the meat surface, to dry it out a bit, so that bacteria can't develop so fast. You won't leave it long enough to dry out enough to affect flavor.

Chopped and ground meats like hamburger and fresh sausage have to be handled even more carefully than large meat pieces. Such meats are usually made from small pieces, and therefore have already been exposed to bacteria in the market. And the very act of grinding a meat means more chances of getting contaminated. There's the meat grinder itself. Then grinding distributes whatever bacteria may have been on the meat surface. It gives those bacteria a larger surface to grow on. So a person really ought to cook ground meats as soon as possible. But between buying and cooking, keep them uncovered and in the coldest part of the refrigerator along with the dairy products.

Once meat has been cooked, it is more easily stored. It should still be kept cold, but it ought to be in a covered dish to keep it from drying out.

To summarize: Keep dairy products covered and in the coldest place in your refrigerator. Keep raw meats alongside them, but in uncovered dishes. But cover cooked meats to keep them from drying out.

